

EXHIBIT O

War within war

The Vietnam war saw countless numbers of America's young men - both black and white - thrown into combat. They were there to fight the Vietcong but, as tension grew in their ranks, they turned on each other. James Maycock reports on how racism, prejudice - and Black Power - were transposed to the battlefield

James Maycock

Fri 14 Sep 2001 21.25 EDT

At the height of the Vietnam war in 1969, John Lee Hooker recorded I Don't Want To Go To Vietnam. In the song, he moaned grimly, "We've got so much trouble at home," before adding simply, "We don't need to go to Vietnam." But the black American soldiers already in Vietnam, trudging tirelessly across that country's saturated rice fields or creeping through its elephant grass and sticky, airless jungles, were understandably more explicit in expressing themselves. Wallace Terry, the Vietnam correspondent for Time magazine between 1967 and 1969, taped black soldiers airing their anger in the summer of 1969. Throughout the recording, their rage is tangible. Speaking about his team-mates, one black soldier declares, "What they been through in the bush, plus what they have to go through back in the world [America], they can't face it. They're ready to just get down and start another civil war." Another adds, "Why should I fight for prejudice?" When Terry inquires, "Tell me what you think the white man should be called?" a chorus of "devil... beast" erupts from the group.

Although President Johnson predicted that the Vietnam war would create a political nightmare, he neglected to foresee the racial one. The ongoing domestic conflicts between black and white Americans were reflected and exacerbated over in Vietnam, principally because the very apex of this increasingly unpopular war, between 1968 and 1969, coincided explosively with the rise of the Black Power era in America. In these years, there was a surge of inter-racial violence within the US forces in Vietnam. Discrimination thrived and, as in America, a racial polarisation arose out of this tension. Black soldiers embraced their culture as well as the emerging Black Power politics and its external symbols.

In fact, the war in Vietnam was America's first racially integrated conflict. Black soldiers had fought in all of America's preceding military engagements, but in segregated units. Although President Truman put pressure on the US armed forces to integrate in 1948, some units in the Korean war were still divided by race.

Prior to 1967, racial animosity had been negligible within the US armed forces in Vietnam because the black men stationed there were professional soldiers seeking a permanent career. Generally, if there were racial slights, they were quietly ignored by these men. On his first exploratory trip to Vietnam in the spring of 1967, Terry today concedes that he sensed "democracy in the foxhole - 'same mud, same blood'." Within a year, however, his feelings had been transformed.

At the beginning of 1965, there were about 23,300 US servicemen in Vietnam. By the end of 1967, this number had jumped to a phenomenal 465,600, the result of Project 100,000, initiated by Johnson in 1966. This dramatically increased the number of US troops in Vietnam by dropping the qualification standards of the draft. Many black Americans who had received an inferior education and, consequently, had evaded the draft, discovered, like Muhammad Ali, that they were now eligible. Of the 246,000 men recruited under Project 100,000 between October 1966 and June 1969, 41% were black, although black Americans represented only 11% of the US population. With a bitter irony, the other group that Project 100,000 condemned was the poor, racially intolerant white man from the southern states of America.

In a country riddled with institutional racism, the draft boards were naturally infected. In 1967, there were no black Americans on the boards in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. In fact, Jack Helms, a member of the Louisiana draft board, was a Grand Wizard in the Ku Klux Klan. In one fatuous outburst, he described the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the highly respected and conservative black civil rights group, as "a communist-inspired, anti-Christ, sex-perversed group of tennis-short beatniks". Although a poll in 1966 established that three out of four black Americans supported the draft, by 1969 56% of the black American population opposed the Vietnam war.

In 1967 and 1968, indignation against the war accelerated among both black and white Americans. Some thought the draft was simply a covert mode of genocide instigated by the US government, while others watched aghast as monstrous sums of money that could ease the impoverished black communities such as Watts in Los Angeles, were pumped into the war machine. The Black Panther, Eldridge Cleaver, denounced these repellent contradictions, stating that black Americans "are asked to die for the system in Vietnam, in Watts they are killed by it".

The perception that the Vietnamese were parallel sufferers of white colonial racist aggression also flourished in the late 1960s and was reflected in a comment made by Muhammad Ali on the TV programme Soul! "They want me to go to Vietnam to shoot some black folks that never lynched me, never called me nigger, never assassinated my leaders." Before his murder in 1968, Martin Luther King also damned America's foreign policy. He charged the US government with being "the greatest purveyor of violence in

the world today", and urged those against the draft to seek the status of conscientious objectors.

Although the image of a white hippy tentatively depositing a flower in the barrel of a rifle is one of the most potent icons of anti-war sentiment from the 1960s, black Americans also fought against the draft. Groups such as the Black Panthers and the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) denounced the war, black Americans burned their draft cards in public and one man escaped to Canada, exclaiming: "I'm not a draft evader, I'm a runaway slave." Robert Holcomb, one of those interviewed in *Bloods*, Terry's oral history of the war by black veterans, describes how, after being hounded by the FBI, he was "sworn into the army in manacles". Like other young black Americans, he diagnosed the Vietnam war as "an attack on minority people, minority people being used to fight each other".

Robert Holcomb perhaps personified what Terry describes today as "a different breed of black soldier entering the battlefield" in the latter half of the 1960s. Terry adds that these hostile black recruits were "veterans of the civil rights movement or the urban upheavals, the riots in the streets. They were being told by judges: 'You'll either join the Marines or go to jail.' " In 1969, during a conversation with Terry, a black naval lieutenant stationed in Vietnam also characterised these black men forced to fight in southeast Asia as "a new generation". He added: "They are the ones who ain't going to take no more shit."

In the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination on April 4, 1968, black Americans rioted in more than 100 US cities. But in Vietnam many white soldiers flagrantly applauded his murder. At Cam Ranh Bay, a group of white men wore Ku Klux Klan robes and paraded around the military base. At another compound, the Confederate flag, so symbolic of racial persecution, was hoisted for three days. Don Browne, a black staff sergeant in Vietnam, overheard a white soldier protesting that King's image was always on TV. "I wish they'd take that nigger's picture off," the soldier said, a moment before Browne granted him "a lesson in when to use that word and when you should not use that word - a physical lesson". King's demise was, of course, a pivotal incident in the 1960s because it represented the switch from the nonviolent civil rights movement to the more militant and aggressive Black Power era. James Hawkins, a black soldier in Vietnam, understood this: "Dr King's death changed things, it made a lot of people angry, angry people with weapons."

At this stage, with the extraordinary increase of mostly reluctant troops - black and white - to Vietnam, covert and overt racism was now rife. The fledgling black American conscript was expected to endure the sight of the Confederate flag painted on Jeeps, tanks and helicopters, and sometimes encountered menacing graffiti, such as "I'd rather kill a nigger than a gook", scrawled on the walls in the latrines of US bases. Other

grisly practices, such as cross burnings, were uprooted from Alabama and Mississippi to the war theatre of Vietnam, and some commanders tolerated Ku Klux Klan "klaverns" on their bases.

Young black soldiers also discovered that white soldiers, notably at Da Nang, repeatedly refused to pick up exhausted black soldiers in their Jeeps and that army barbers were not trained to cut black hair, although the merest hint of an Afro was penalised. In Terry's recording from 1969, one black sailor describes how, "when they caught a brother with an Afro, they just took him down to the brig and cut all his hair off and throw him in jail. All these beast motherfuckers walking around with their hair looking like goddamn girls and we can't wear our hair motherfucking three inches long." White officers were either sympathetic to or simply disregarded white soldiers who printed "Fuck the war" or "Peace" on their helmets, yet black Americans were disciplined for comparable offences. One black soldier was ordered to remove a "Black is beautiful" poster from the inside of his locker.

The post exchanges and libraries on the bases did not stock black hair products, tapes of soul music or books on black American culture and history. Magazines such as Ebony and Jet were also scarce, as one black private grumbled: "Every time a soul brother over here gets an Ebony or Jet, there is a waiting line of at least 30 to 50 soul brothers waiting to read it." Terry once stated, "If blacks can account for up to 22% of the dying, they should at least have 22% of the jukebox or the music on Armed Forces radio." Yet black American music was neglected by the Armed Forces Radio Network and in the enlisted men's clubs in preference for country music.

Today, Terry comments, laughing: "I find it amusing to see a Vietnam movie and the white guys are popping their fingers to black music. That just didn't happen. This is revisionism." In fact, Terry Whitmore, the author of *Memphis-'Nam-Sweden: The Story Of A Black Deserter*, witnessed a minor riot in the Freedom Hill post exchange at Da Nang after the manager of the beer garden, irritated by the number of black marines socialising there, promptly withdrew all soul music from the jukebox. But such incidents weren't confined to land. Off the coast of Vietnam, on the USS Sumpter, Captain JS Keuger also banned the music of the Last Poets, whose recordings included *When The Revolution Comes*. The affronted black sailors subsequently signed a petition, a fight erupted and they were charged with mutiny. Dissension over music resulted in a multitude of other brawls and Jet magazine reported that a white officer was killed in Quang Tri after ordering black soldiers to turn down their music.

Military justice in Vietnam was also rarely racially impartial. Black servicemen were frequently sentenced to longer terms than their white counterparts and, once inside a military prison, black Muslim inmates were refused copies of the Koran. During this period, one black marine pointed out, "The Corps says it treats all men just one way - as

a marine. What it actually has done is treat everybody like a white marine." But, most disturbingly, black Americans were dying at a disproportionate rate and this only inflamed their indignation, as one black private remonstrated: "You should see for yourself how the black man is being treated over here and the way we are dying. When it comes to rank, we are left out. When it comes to special privileges, we are left out. When it comes to patrols, operations and so forth, we are first."

Their predicament was aggravated by a weakening in the chain of command. Many of the very young, naive white officers were incapable of diffusing the racial tension and, at times, white privates informed their superior black officers, including Allen Thomas, that they "weren't going to take orders from a nigger".

But, as the naval lieutenant informed Terry back in 1969, these black soldiers were "the ones who ain't going to take no more shit". The black Americans who were drafted from 1967 to 1970 called themselves Bloods, and many were influenced by the teachings and politics of Stokely Carmichael, the Black Panthers and Malcolm X.

Terry explains: "They would wear black amulets, they would wear black beads, black gloves to show their identity and racial pride." Some wore "slave bracelets" made out of boot laces and walked with "Black Power canes", sticks with the nub carved into a clenched fist. To offset the oppressive ubiquity of the Confederate flag, these soldiers flew black flags from their patrol boats and Jeeps. Another group of black servicemen, who were followers of Ron Karenga's US (United Slaves), created a flag that asserted in Swahili "My fear is for you". The "dap", a complicated ritualised handshake that changed from unit to unit, was also common among black personnel in Vietnam. Black privates and officers, too, acknowledged each other in public with a Black Power salute.

One black soldier, drained by the tense racial atmosphere in the enlisted men's clubs, commented: "Chuck's [euphemism for a white man] all right until he gets a beer under his belt and then it's nigger this and nigger that, and besides, to be honest, Chuck ain't too much fun, you dig?" Indeed, by the late 1960s in Vietnam, black and white soldiers were socialising in separate bars and clubs. In Saigon, the black servicemen congregated in the Khanh Hoi district and, sometimes, protected their preferred venues with signs that warned "No Rabbits [white soldiers] Allowed."

To increase their racial solidarity, some black troops also started semi-militant bodies. Blacks In Action, the Unsatisfied Black Soldier, the Ju Jus and the Mau Maus were just some of these groups that, as Terry explains, "supported each other and studied black history and talked about events in America and were willing to support each other in an enlisted club over black music. If they wanted something in the post exchange, they would collectively request it."

The tension between the races, though, was not tamed before it erupted into violence. White officers who didn't offer lifts to black marines were attacked, there was a major riot at the principal military prison, the Long Binh Stockade, in October 1968, and a critical inter-racial clash on the Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier in October 1972. At China Beach, some white soldiers started flinging rocks and abuse at black servicemen. Soon, the two racial groups were nervously facing each other with loaded weapons.

However, most assaults involved only a few participants, generally in a deserted corner of an army base at night. Such conduct was wholly advocated by members of the Black Panthers in America. Kathleen Cleaver, the wife of Eldridge Cleaver, urged black soldiers: "Right inside of the US imperialist beast's army, you are strategically placed to begin the process of destroying him from within." Huey Newton, the founder of the party, also suggested that black army personnel turn their weapons on white officers. "Fragging" was the term used to describe either wounding or killing an officer by rolling a fragmentation grenade into his tent. But both black and white soldiers were involved in this and only some of these attacks were racially motivated.

A few black soldiers chose to desert, and while some, like Terry Whitmore, were smuggled through the USSR to Sweden, most fugitives hid within Vietnam. By 1971, about 100 deserters were living furtively in a district of Saigon nicknamed "Soul Alley", beside Tan Son Nhut airport. Understandably, though, some of the young black troops cracked. Robert Holcomb recalled in *Bloods*: "This black soldier had taken some drugs and he just sort of went crazy. A lot of his anxieties and hostilities came out. He got an M-16 and he sprayed a sergeant, killed him and two others."

The Vietcong were quick to detect and exploit the racial conflicts within the US forces. They dropped thousands of propaganda leaflets on the battlefields. A typical one read: "If you go AWOL because you don't want to fight or because you can't put up with the army racism, the NFL will get you out of the country." But authentic images of US policemen beating black civil rights workers were also scattered across the war zones to undermine the black soldier's morale. Today, Wallace Terry recalls that, bizarrely, the Vietcong sometimes screamed, "Go home, soul man", at the black soldiers during combat and Browne, who was interviewed in Terry's *Bloods*, described how, "to play on the sympathy of the black soldier, the Vietcong would shoot at a white guy, then let the black guy behind him go through, then shoot at the next white guy". Other black servicemen, including the deserter Whitmore, reported identical cases. But the huge number of black soldiers killed in action and the maltreatment of black prisoners of war was ample proof that the Vietcong and the NVA were simply manipulating the racial discord within the American ranks.

Amazingly, though, it was in these very war zones that the antagonism between black and white infantrymen dissolved, as the black soldier James Hawkins admitted: "In the

jungle, you don't think in terms of black and white." Another said: "When I'm out in the bush carrying a grenade launcher, no white man is going to call me nigger." Arthur Woodley, a black long-range patrolman interviewed by Terry, explained: "No matter what his ethnic background is, or his ideals, you start to depend on that person to cover your ass."

In fact, Woodley rescued a wounded member of the Ku Klux Klan in his unit who had been discarded by his white team-mates. The man was forced to re-examine his bigotry and, throughout the war, there were other examples of white men whose racial prejudices were shattered by the selfless acts of black soldiers. Although, in 1969, one black lieutenant commented somewhat cynically that the "threat of death changes many things, but comradeship doesn't last after you get back to the village", the disparity in inter-racial hatred at the rear army bases and in the war theatre itself was immense.

Initially, white army officials reacted aggressively to both the potent exhibition of black unity and to the racial turmoil within the US army in Vietnam. They ordered crowds of black servicemen to be broken up, a few symbolic gestures, such as the "dap", were banned, numerous soldiers were disciplined and the more radical militants were presented with dishonourable discharges that subsequently disqualified them from financial aid back in America.

Ultimately, however, the military authorities were compelled to confront the deepening crisis, and in 1969 General Leonard Chapman conceded: "There is no question we've got a problem." Surprisingly, and to its credit, the army responded with impressive speed and instigated myriad reforms. It investigated and addressed each field in which discrimination and prejudice had thrived, from the post exchanges to the dearth of black officers. Mandatory Watch And Action Committees were introduced into each unit, and today, Terry confirms, the US military authorities "make it clear to their top officers that racism can cost you your career". He adds: "I call it the last civil rights movement. It started in the armed forces in Vietnam, and it spread into revolts on the high seas on certain ships and then to air force bases in the States and army bases in Germany."

In fact, in 1972 Wallace Terry was hired by the US Air Force to examine parallel racial predicaments in Germany; and today he is adamant that "Colin Powell would not have become chairman of the joint chiefs had it not been for those black kids protesting in Vietnam. You can draw a direct line."

But although the defiant black servicemen in Vietnam at the end of the 1960s created a robust and positive legacy for the next generation of black soldiers and sailors, it was, of course, forged at a price. If they survived their tour of duty, they returned to a frigid,

indifferent America, the country for which they had risked their lives. Sadly, the extraordinary unity that Terry had witnessed among the black soldiers in Vietnam crumbled. "They didn't come home together, they went to different cities and they returned at different times." Forty per cent of black veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, compared with 20% of white veterans, and in the early 1970s Richard Nixon's policy of "benign neglect" was dismantling the progress of the civil rights movement. One black veteran with an administrative discharge said bitterly, "I've got friends who've robbed liquor stores who can get jobs easier than me."

Arthur Woodley had enlisted in the US army to "escape from my environment and get ahead in life". On his return to America, he worked sporadically in miscellaneous jobs throughout the 1970s but, when interviewed by Terry in the early 1980s, he was unemployed. He had recently met, quite by chance, a South Vietnamese man he had befriended during the war and who was, years later, residing in Baltimore. "He's got a business, good home, driving cars, and I'm still struggling," he reported angrily. "Living in America in the 1980s is a war for survival among black folks, and black veterans are being overlooked more than everybody."

I hope you appreciated this article. Before you move on, I was hoping you would consider taking the step of supporting the Guardian's journalism.

From Elon Musk to Rupert Murdoch, a small number of billionaire owners have a powerful hold on so much of the information that reaches the public about what's happening in the world. The Guardian is different. We have no billionaire owner or shareholders to consider. Our journalism is produced to serve the public interest - not profit motives.

And we avoid the trap that befalls much US media - the tendency, born of a desire to please all sides, to engage in false equivalence in the name of neutrality. While fairness guides everything we do, we know there is a right and a wrong position in the fight against racism and for reproductive justice. When we report on issues like the climate crisis, we're not afraid to name who is responsible. And as a global news organization, we're able to provide a fresh, outsider perspective on US politics - one so often missing from the insular American media bubble.

Around the world, readers can access the Guardian's paywall-free journalism because of our unique reader-supported model. That's because of people like you. Our readers keep us independent, beholden to no outside influence and accessible to everyone - whether they can afford to pay for news, or not.

If you can, please consider supporting us just once from \$1, or better yet, support us every month with a little more - and you can cancel any time. Thank you.



Betsy Reed
Editor, Guardian US

Single

Monthly

Annual

\$5 per month

\$7 per month

Other

Continue →

Remind me in October

VISA

